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NEA/ELA, WHA/CCA

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TAGS: ETRD ETTC PREL CU SY

SUBJECT: SYRIA-CUBA: TITLE III OF THE LIBERTAD ACT, MAY 2007

REF: SECSTATE 065523

Classified By: A/DCM William Roebuck, for reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) In response to reftel: Actual trade during 2005 (the most recent official data available from the SARG) totaled USD 106,978 in Syrian exports to Cuba and USD 160,834 in Syrian imports from Cuba. The Director of International Relations at the Syrian Ministry of Economy and Trade told EconFSN that the only agreement in effect with Cuba is a pro forma "trade agreement" from 1998, ratified in 2000, that Syria signs with all "friend" countries. The agreement gives no reduced customs or other preferential access to either market, but is an expression of the SARG's intent to increase and encourage trade with Cuba.

¶2. (C) There have been a number of Cuban visits to Syria in the past few months. First Deputy Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla accepted a Syrian MFA invitation to visit from March 30 - April 2, and met with VP Farouk al-Shara'a, FM Walid Mu'allim, Information Minister Mohseun Bilal and Deputy FM Faisal Miqdad. Additionally, Cuban Minister of Foreign Investments and Economic Cooperation Marta Lomas Moralis visited Damascus on April 4-5 for the fourth session of the Joint Syrian-Cuban Committee, headed on the Syrian side by Minister of Economy and Trade Amer Lotfi. (The agenda included discussions of cooperation in the health and medical field and medical industrialization in both countries. A joint agricultural committee was also formed, to meet periodically regarding zoological health issues.) Finally, Cuban Parliamentarian and Foreign Affairs Committee member Kendia Serrano traveled to Damascus May 8-10, meeting with Information Minister Bilal and visiting the city of Quneitra, in the Golan, on the border between Syria and Israel.

¶3. (C) Post is unaware of any exchange programs between the two countries. There are no policies or actions taken by the SARG to advance democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cuba.

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